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Libya-Chad: Cultural Factors Behind Libyan Intervention in Africa

An Intelligence Memorandum

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**Libya-Chad:
Cultural Factors Behind
Libyan Intervention in Africa**

Summary

Arab bedouins have long involved themselves in the affairs of their African neighbors through religious proselytization, economic exploitation, or political domination. These factors probably are more important than any strategic or economic considerations in sustaining Qadhafi's determination to control Chad.

Nomadic tribes of the Sahara, whether Arab or African, have little sense of political identification with governments. Qadhafi is attempting with growing success to incorporate the existing cross-border tribal affiliations into his Greater Sahara unity scheme. He is also making far-reaching territorial claims based on precedents established by a now prohibited Libyan religious order, the Sanusi, that controlled parts of Egypt, Sudan, Chad, and Niger in the late 19th century. Such claims reinforce the fears of neighboring African leaders about Libya's ultimate aims.

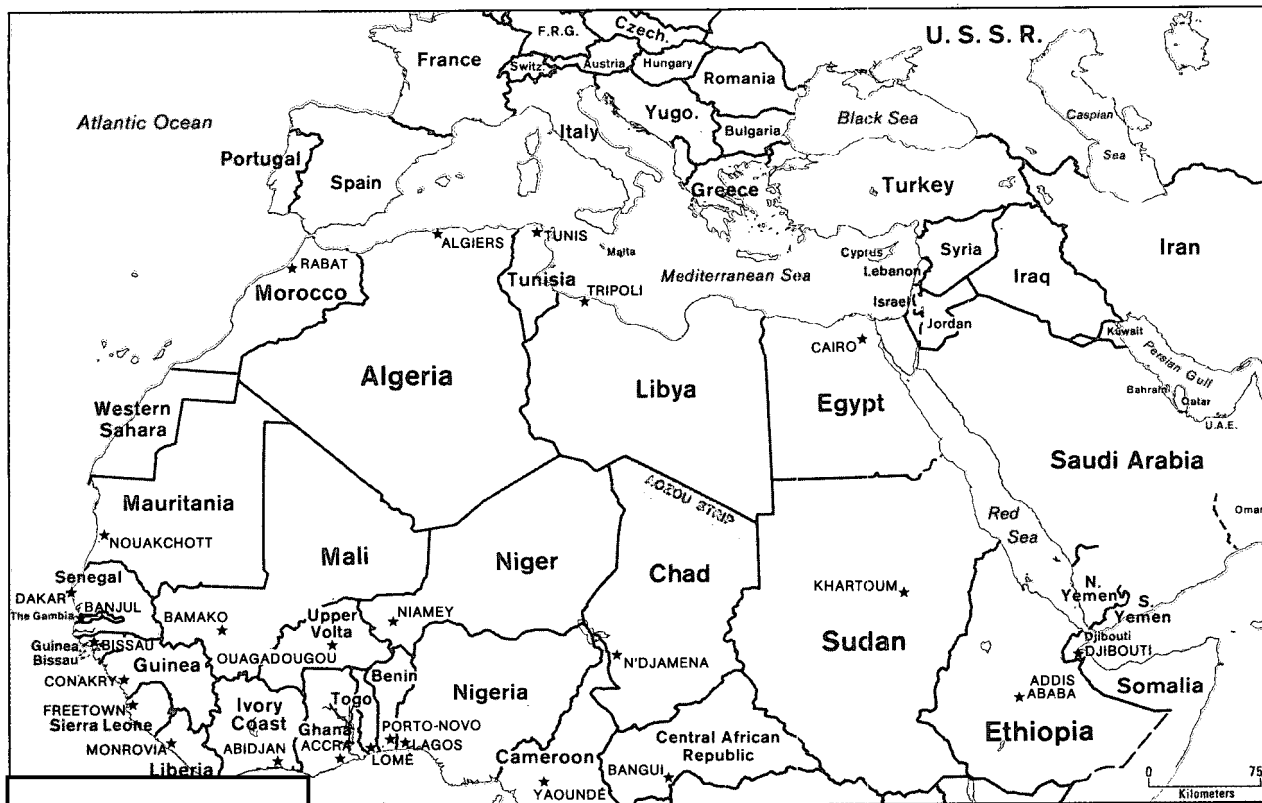
Continued involvement in the affairs of Libya's neighbors will nourish Qadhafi's need for international attention and demonstrate his unwillingness to accept the Libyan borders defined by the former colonial powers. Involvement by France or the United States in efforts to counter the Libyan presence in these states will only reinforce Qadhafi's determination to stay.

This memorandum was prepared by the Egypt-North Africa Branch, Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis. It was coordinated with the Office of Geographic and Societal Research, the Office of Central Reference, the Directorate of Operations, and the National Intelligence Officers for Near East and South Asia and for Africa. Research was completed on 18 January 1981. Questions and comments are welcome and should be directed to the Chief, Near East South Asia Division, OPA.

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**Qadhafi's Bedouin
Heritage**

A number of factors in the personal life of Mu'ammar Qadhafi have contributed to

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Qadhafi's father was a bedouin nomad who reportedly was a hero in the 1915 battle of Qasr bu hadi against colonial Italian forces. An only son, Qadhafi enjoyed the unique privilege of being the first member of his tribe to receive a formal education. Already imbued with the strong sense of independence that is an integral part of the bedouin ethos, Qadhafi's uniqueness—a Qadhadhafa, only son of a tribal hero, and only educated member of his tribe—added a dimension to his developing personality.

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According to bedouin culture, boundaries—whether of a tribe, clan, or family—are considered only temporary definitions of areas of influence. If a tribe's strength increases or decreases appreciably, tribal boundaries will expand or contract accordingly. The underutilization of tribal power is unheard of in bedouin culture, and Qadhafi's military exploits in neighboring countries—when viewed in a bedouin context—are attempts to extend Libyan national boundaries by using increased military strength.

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The behavior of Qadhafi is neither psychotic nor random.

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Acceptance of the status quo is the antithesis of bedouin life. In this perspective, Qadhafi's policies toward neighboring African states are obligations of his bedouin heritage and can be expected to persist.

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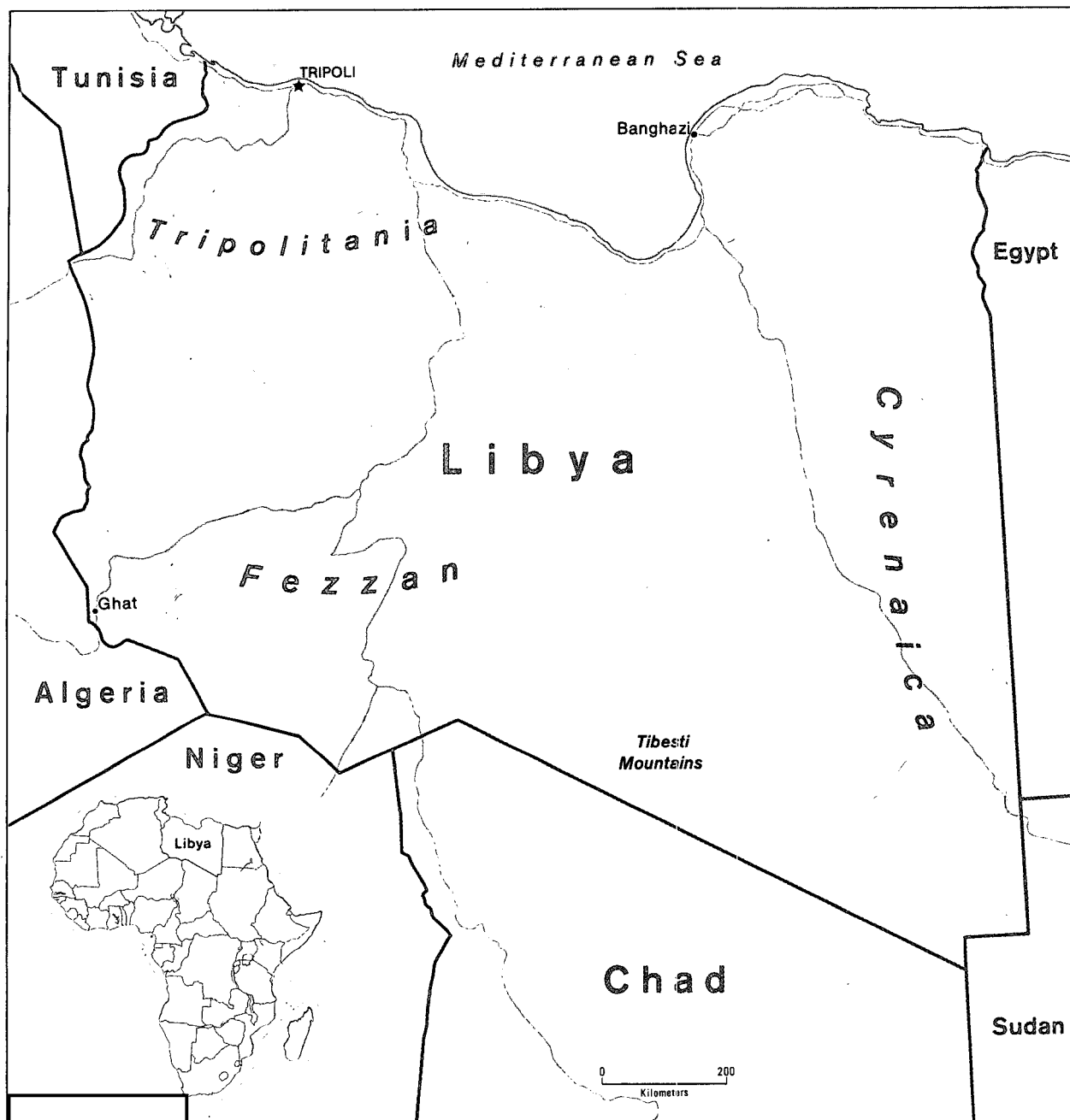
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**Reaction to Colonial
Borders**

Qadhafi's unwillingness to accept national borders as deterrents to his activities or ambitions is reinforced by the fact that Libya's state boundaries were set by agreements between foreign colonial powers. They were imposed without respect for tradition, tribal loyalties, or religious cults and were in essence de jure demarcations with little validity or significance to the peoples of the area. Remarkably straight lines separate Libya from Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt and demonstrate that indigenous factors were swept aside when spheres of influence were delineated in 1925 and 1935 by

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Italy, France, and Great Britain. Qadhafi probably sees recognition of these borders as acceding to the imposition of Western will on the Saharan people. Tribal, religious, and legal claims give him ample reason, in his view, for Libyan involvement in the affairs of other African nations [REDACTED] 25X

His first overt move to exert control outside Libya was in mid-1973. Since then, Libyan troops have occupied the 27,000 square mile Aozou Strip along Chad's northern border, which, according to old and incomplete French surveys, may contain iron and low grade uranium ore. Libya's claim to the area is based on traditional claims of an influential Libyan religious order, the Sanusi, and on a 1935 draft treaty—never ratified by the French Parliament. Under the treaty France agreed to cede the area to Italy, which then controlled Libya, in return for territorial concessions elsewhere. The recently proposed Libya-Chad union has substantiated African fears that Qadhafi intends more than just the annexation of the border strip [REDACTED]

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The Sanusi Tradition

In the middle of the 19th century, there arose in Cyrenaica a religious revivalist movement, the Sanusi, that had a pervasive impact on the tribes of the Sahara. A sect of Sunni Islam, the Sanusi order established a number of zawayias (lodges) throughout much of Libya, Egypt, Sudan, Chad, and Niger. These zawayias, which were colleges, monasteries, and markets, were often built at watering places on trade and pilgrim routes. Travelers who stopped there were subjected to Sanusi proselytizing. The propagation of the movement was facilitated by its adaptation to the needs of tribal society, which had not changed markedly in the centuries since the Arabs first accepted Islam. The bedouin tribal system gave the order its political foundations. The order, in turn, contributed an organization that gave some coherence to a chaotic and undisciplined society [REDACTED] 25X

The Sanusi order flourished under 19th century Ottoman rule. The Turks, who were satisfied with a pledge of tribal loyalty and the payment of taxes, encountered strong local opposition to their authority and showed little interest in implementing Ottoman control over Fezzan and the interior of Cyrenaica. In essence, the Sanusi order became a state within a state, administering day-to-day local affairs and mediating intertribal disputes. The coherence that the order gave to the tribal structure led to the development of the Sanusi as the first indigenous national symbol of the tribes of North Central Sahara. [REDACTED] 25X

The southern expansion of the Sanusi order was halted by advancing French forces in the Sahara and Central Sudan. The struggle with the French brought the tribes together and strengthened their ties with the order in the face of a common enemy. The French eventually won out and Sanusi influence receded from Central Africa at the end of the 19th century, but

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the Sanusi remained strong in Cyrenaica. The ascetic demands of the puritanical religious reform movement, however, still influence the religious pretensions of Qadhafi's foreign policy in Central Africa; his claims to parts of Niger, Chad, Sudan, and Egypt are based on the area of Sanusi influence prior to the French intervention [REDACTED]

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The Sanusi constituted the major resistance to the Italian colonization of Libya during the 20th century. Zawayias developed into national resistance centers for the Saharan troops, providing support, financial assistance, and a communications network between the various tribes. The limited political cohesion that developed among the nomads was recognized by the colonial powers when King Idris I, a Sanusi amir, was selected to govern independent Libya in 1951 [REDACTED]

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The Sanusi order is now officially prohibited in Libya as Qadhafi is unwilling to tolerate the formal existence of public organizations independent of the government. Although the ban effectively stifles the order's political expression, it is probably not designed to destroy an Islamic movement that has dictated every aspect of the lives of Libyan bedouins for over 100 years. [REDACTED]

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Qadhafi, although not a Sanusi, probably considers himself heir to the Sanusi tradition. By virtue of his propagation of Islam, intervention in the affairs of Libya's southern neighbors, and his ascetic religious behavior, Qadhafi has assumed a position of leadership in an indigenous religious reform movement that claims a historic spiritual and political heritage in no less than five African states. Even the national people's congresses outlined in Qadhafi's *Green Book* bear a marked resemblance to the nascent political structure of Sanusi zawayias of the late 19th century [REDACTED]

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Border Tribes

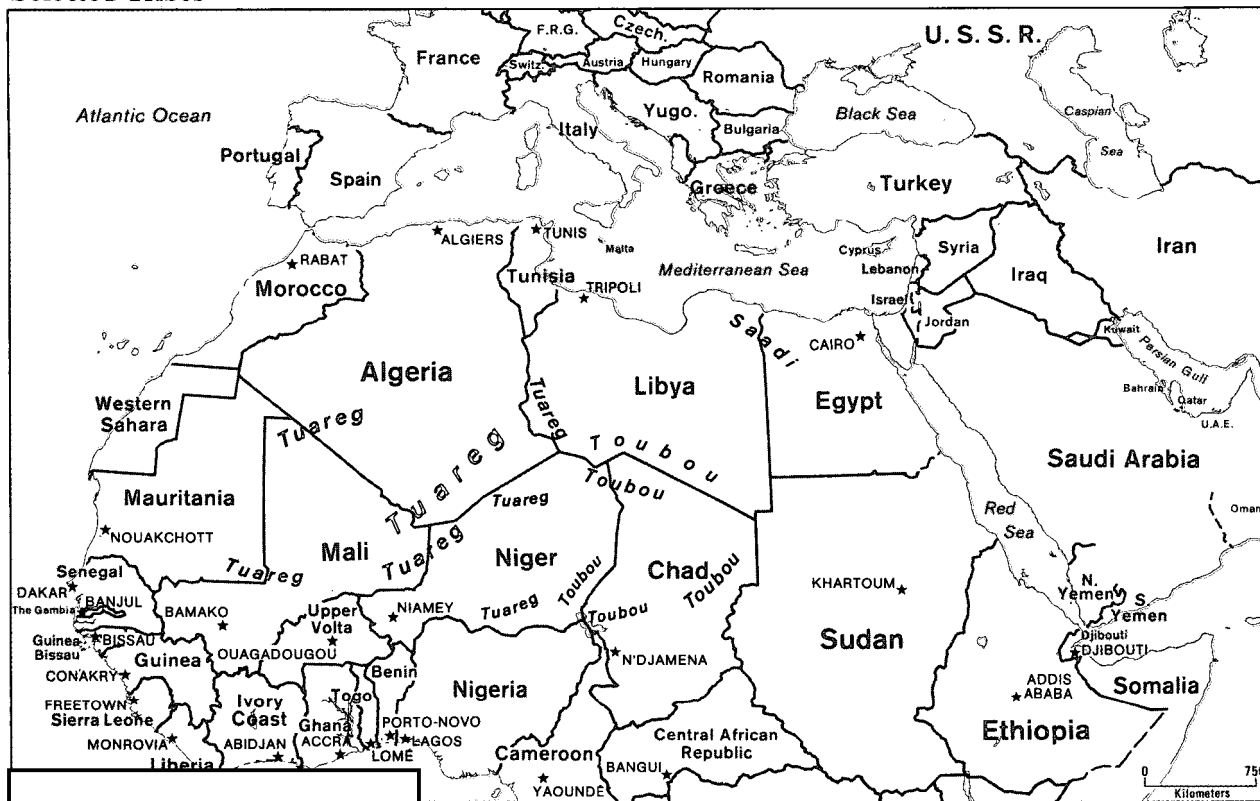
Until independence in 1951, Libya was essentially an assemblage of tribes, regions, and cities loosely connected under a succession of colonial empires. The numerous nomadic tribes of the Libyan Sahara never fully acquiesced to foreign domination. At the same time they were unable to unite for more than brief periods in the face of a common enemy. Traditional tribal identification and rivalries and the strong sense of independence inherent in the tribal ethos have perpetuated the fractious nature of Libyan society even though many nomadic tribesmen have adopted a sedentary existence in urban areas. Numerous tribes have publicly pledged their support for the Qadhafi regime, but the extent and durability of that support are questionable. When bodies of Libyan soldiers killed in Chad arrived in Benghazi late last year, Libyan tribes held large rallies at which they demanded that Qadhafi's tribe—the Qadhadhafa—pay the price for the blood of their sons. [REDACTED]

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Selected Tribes



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Libya's tribal makeup has implications that involve Qadhafi in adventures far beyond Libya's borders. Chad's problems are in large measure a struggle between tribal factions in which Qadhafi has chosen sides. Libyan troops move in and out of Algeria—despite protests from Algiers—protecting nomadic lands. Other tribes move back and forth between Libya and Egypt—raising fears by each that the other is exploiting the bedouin for subversive purposes.

The Toubou. The border areas of Libya, Niger, and Chad are inhabited primarily by the Toubou nomadic tribes. In the local language a Toubou means “a man from Tibesti” (a mountain region on the Libya-Chad border), either an inhabitant of that region or one believed to have lived there at one time. The Toubou, who are nominally Sanusi but retain many of their earlier religious beliefs and practices, are nomadic or seminomadic and freely cross the borders during the dry season.

The language of the Toubou, although distinctly Saharan, resembles the language of Niger and is composed of two main dialects that are mutually

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comprehensible. Tedaga is spoken by the Teda subgroup, which inhabits the areas of southern Libya, northern Chad, and northeastern Niger. Dazaga is the language of the Daza subgroup, which is located in central Chad and eastern Niger. The Teda nomads formerly derived most of their revenue from a combination of caravan trade, protection fees extracted from the caravans of others, and caravan raiding. The vicissitudes of time, including the replacement of camels by trucks, have forced the Teda to survive by breeding camels and cultivating date palms. The Daza, being more sedentary than their northern neighbors, raise horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, and cattle [REDACTED]

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The political organization of the border Toubou, the Teda, seems to be elastic and the position of the various clans within it very unstable. The principle of freedom raised almost to the level of anarchy is so deeply rooted that many families refuse to acknowledge anyone as their chief.

Chieftainship in the Tibesti region appears at the level of subtribe, which is a unit made up of clans and factions held together by ties of kinship and geopolitical considerations. But these chiefs exert little influence on the actions of clans other than the settlement of minor tribal disputes. [REDACTED]

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The recent hostilities in Chad have distinct tribal dimensions. President Goukouni Weddeye, who received military assistance from Qadhafi, is a Teda Toubou, while his rival, former Minister of Defense Hissein Habre is from the Anakassa group of the Daza Toubou.² Because of the ephemeral nature of Toubou tribal allegiances, one leader—such as Goukouni—may be able to impose himself over several tribes in time of stress or victory. But such tenure is unsure, as evidenced by the defection of the Daza-Anakassa under Habre. [REDACTED]

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Qadhafi's involvement in the affairs of border tribal groups is in keeping with the historic attitude of the Arab bedouins toward the Toubou. Arabs have for centuries sought to dominate them. Toubous, in return, have a deep distrust of their northern neighbors. Although Goukouni may have agreed to a political accommodation with Qadhafi, the majority of Toubou tribesmen—both Teda and Daza—no doubt oppose protracted Libyan involvement in Toubou affairs. If Qadhafi is planning on using Chad for an offensive against neighboring states, therefore, he will have to act before Toubou resistance develops. [REDACTED]

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The Tuareg. A few thousand Tuareg nomads live scattered in the southwestern Libyan desert and claim close relationship with the larger Tuareg populations of Algeria, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali. Politically, the Tuareg

² Goukouni's father was the last *derdi*—a French-appointed tribal leader who served as administrative intermediary between the colonial government and the Toubou tribesmen—but Goukouni would not be heir to that position, which traditionally was rotated among three noble families of the Teda. [REDACTED]

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nation is divided into confederations consisting of various tribes, which are divided into clans and further broken down into factions. Socially, the nomadic population is divided into three main classes: the Tuareg "nobles," "vassals," and Negro slaves. The Tuareg have a rigidly formalized division of labor and firm authority based on established rank. Although not Sanusis, the Tuareg adhere to a form of Sunni Islam that incorporates nonorthodox magical elements and therefore identify with other Muslim nomadic tribes.

[REDACTED] 25X

The Tuareg, like the Toubou, have a strong sense of independence and little feeling of political identification with governments. Both the Libyans and the Algerians have vied for the allegiance of the Tuareg nomads in their attempts to establish control in the Sahel. The Libyan Tuareg regularly cross into Algeria during seasonal migrations. Libyan troops have even accompanied Tuareg nomads to water wells 80 kilometers inside Algeria between the Libyan border town of Ghat and the Niger border. Resulting Algerian demarches to Tripoli have gone largely unheeded, and Libyan troops continue to cross the border. [REDACTED] 25X

Although there are fewer Tuareg in Libya than in several other African states, Qadhafi has exploited the case of the Tuaregs to reaffirm the commonality of Saharan Africa. As a pretext for his pan-African ambitions, Qadhafi claims a common heritage with African nations that do not share a common border with Libya. Since the Tuareg inhabit such a large area of the western Sahara, Qadhafi has alarmed even distant African nations with his aggressive policies and calls for Saharan unity. [REDACTED] 25X

The Saadi. The Saadi bedouins originally were unique to Libya. Most of the Saadi tribes, however, were driven from Cyrenaica into Egypt during the 19th century by the Turkish pasha of Tripoli. After years of resistance to Egyptian authority, many of the tribes were forced to give up their nomadic lifestyle for a sedentary existence, some settling as far east as the Nile delta. There are reportedly more than 1 million descendants of Saadi tribesmen in Egypt, with as many as 100,000 maintaining close ties with their Cyrenaican cousins. [REDACTED] 25X

Some of the Saadi tribes, notably the Awlad Ali, have maintained relatively strong tribal cohesion and roam freely across the Libyan border to areas inhabited by smaller Libyan branches of the tribe. The Awlad Ali and a few other Saadi tribes with Cyrenaican origins have clung to nomadic traditions and probably have little affinity with either the Libyan or Egyptian Governments. The Saadi have historically felt a strong sense of independence marked by longstanding antipathy for Egyptians and more recent antagonism toward the Qadhafi regime. Egypt and Libya are each concerned that these negative sentiments of the Saadi will be exploited by the other, thus straining further an already difficult border situation [REDACTED] 25X

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